



RECEIVED

MAR 17 2011

SHARON BULOVA

March 15, 2011

Sharon Bulova
Chairman, Board of Supervisors
12000 Government Center Parkway
Suite 530
Fairfax, VA 22035-0079

Dear Chairman Bulova and Members of the Board of Supervisors:

Eliminating inefficient uses of energy is one of the simplest and least costly ways to reduce the adverse impacts energy consumption has on public health, the environment and national energy security. The Sierra Club believes that Fairfax County could be acting more decisively to assist residents to use energy more efficiently and responsibly. We have an energy efficiency suggestion that would save us energy and promote the County's promise to reduce countywide greenhouse gas emissions under its Cool Counties pledge.

The standby ("vampire") electrical requirement built into the design of most proprietary cable TV set-top boxes supplied by cable providers is one of the larger examples of electrical inefficiency in our homes. When TV viewers believe they have turned the units "off", the boxes actually remain on, drawing between 10 and 47 watts. The amount used is often the same level of energy consumed when the TV is "on". This wastefulness is ignored by most cable TV providers and is hard for residential consumers to avoid. Among all appliance types, the set-top box group consumes the highest level of standby electrical current. We suggest the Board of Supervisors pass a resolution to encourage the County's cable TV franchisees such as Comcast, Verizon and Cox Communications, to voluntarily adopt the ENERGY STAR program for Cable Service Providers.

The ENERGY STAR program has developed design standards to address the inefficiencies of conventional set-top boxes by specifying a set of efficiency operating parameters. The program, now in its second iteration, sets criteria for reducing energy consumption by better than 40 percent of the amounts used by conventional boxes, and it includes criteria to assure that conventional units in the homes of current customers are scheduled for replacement within a reasonable period of time. ENERGY STAR's version 3 requirements establish a "deep sleep" standby requirement of less than 2 watts for "high functionality" boxes, defined as those with digital record capability. This standard will save nearly 200 kWhs annually for each high functionality box replaced by an ENERGY STAR unit.

Taking Cox Communications as an example, we believe the savings available through the ENERGY STAR program may average more than 100 kilowatt hours a year for every Cox customer in Fairfax with a set-top box. There are approximately 250,000 Cox customers in the County with as many as 200,000 set-top boxes supplied by Cox from Cisco's Scientific Atlanta division. Both Cox Communications and Cisco are striving to be green companies and have implemented corporate-wide GHG emissions reduction programs. However, we find no evidence that either company has publicly recognized how it may indirectly reduce energy

waste by providing their customers with ENERGY STAR compliant set-top boxes. In Virginia, about 1,200 pounds of CO2 are released for every 1,000 kilowatt hours of electricity consumed, or about 6,000 tons avoided annually for every 100,000 set-top boxes made ENERGY STAR compliant. To give this figure some context, 6,000 tons of CO2 are emitted when 618,000 gallons of gasoline are consumed. Cisco and Motorola (which manufactures the boxes used by Verizon) are familiar with the program, as both have submitted comments on draft specifications.

Other companies have demonstrated that the transition to Energy Star compliant boxes can be successful. The satellite service company, Direct TV, has been an ENERGY STAR partner under the current version since January 2009, and Direct TV reports on its web site that over 10 million customers are using Direct TV's ENERGY STAR compliant boxes. ENERGY STAR estimates indicate that if every set-top box in service today were replaced with a version 3 compliant box, the annual electrical savings to our nation's consumers would exceed \$1.8 billion.

The Department of Cable Communications and Consumer Affairs has informed us that the federal Communications Act prevents the County from imposing set-top box requirements on cable franchisees in Fairfax. None of the three cable franchisees in Fairfax is currently a partner, and there is scant evidence indicating any one of them is in the process of adopting the ENERGY STAR program.


To nudge the three cable providers in the right direction, the Board of Supervisors should ask our providers to become ENERGY STAR partners under the program for cable service providers. We urge the Board to pass a resolution directing the County Executive to send a letter to the Chief Executive Officers of Cox Communications, Verizon and Comcast, asking the cable service franchisees to voluntarily adopt the ENERGY STAR Program for Cable Service Providers and to begin its implementation in Fairfax during 2011. Version 3 commences September 1, leaving ample lead-time for implementation. The letter could include as an incentive, a promise to publicly recognize the franchisee should it adopt Energy Star for Cable Service, including information on the public benefits of the franchisee's decision to join the ENERGY STAR Program for Cable Service.

We suggest that the County's letter to the providers request a response to the Board within 60 days, reporting on the corporate decision that is made.

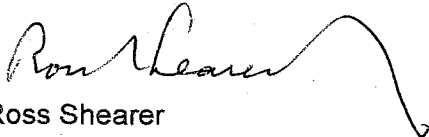
Sincerely,



Chris Koerner, Chair
Great Falls Group
Virginia Chapter Sierra Club



Steven Bruckner
Conservation Chair
Virginia Chapter Sierra Club



Ross Shearer
Set-top box contact